How the School Context can Influence an Open Discussion Climate

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Introduction

Within a democratic society, civic values and attitudes are shaped by socializing agents during the formative years, starting in early adulthood (Flanagan, 2013; Gimpel, Lay, & Schuknecht, 2003; Langton & Jennings, 1968; Neundorf, Smets, & Garcia-Albacete, 2013). Concerns have been raised by many scholars who reported evidence of declined civic commitment and participation (Galston, 2001; Niemi & Junn, 1998; Putnam, 2000). Diffuse support for the democratic system is considered to be essential to sustain a healthy democracy (Flanagan, Cumsille, Gill, & Gallay, 2007). This resulted in a renewed attention for the role of the educational system in the development of democratic values for our younger generations. Schools can contribute in divers ways to democratic capacity building, through civics courses, extra-curricular activities, service learning or a democratic school climate (Claes, Hooghe, & Marien, 2012; Dijkstra, Geijsel, Ledoux, van der Veen, & ten Dam, 2015; Flanagan, Kim, Collura, & Kopish, 2014; Kahne & Sporte, 2008; Lin, 2013; McFarland & Starmanns, 2009; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997). And it is the latter that we are interested in for this paper, the democratic climate of the school.

When we want students to learn how to become engaged citizens, we need to let them experience what a democracy is (Dewey, 1916; Parker, 2003). We draw on a central component of deliberative democratic theory (Bächtiger & Steiner, 2005; Dryzek, 2009; Enslin, Pendlebury, & Tjiattas, 2001; Fishkin & Luskin, 2005; Gutmann & Thompson, 2004; ten Dam & Volman, 2004), which receives an increasing amount of attention within citizenship educational research, to place discussion at the centre of what we call 'the democratic school': a school where democracy can be experienced and practices, where students interact with each other on social and political issues and a place where diversity, and tolerance towards this diversity, is seen as a virtue and not as a threat (Hess, 2009; Parker, 2003). Students' wellbeing within the school environment is important to nurture students' feelings of motivation and engagement (Wentzel, 1997). Based on literature and research, we believe a good relation between students and teachers is key, as well as students' believe they can make a difference if they want to, for schools to be a suitable playground for practicing deliberative skills.

The proposed paper aims to investigate what makes schools good sites for deliberation. Based on deliberative democratic theory, the importance of political efficacy for the preservation of an engaged citizenry and the crucial role of the teacher in a democratic school, we measure what stimulates an open discussion climate in secondary education, using the Belgian sample of the IEA ICCS 2009 data (Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr, & Losito, 2010).

Why schools matter

Schools are expected to contribute to preparing students for engaged citizenship. Even taking only the amount of years of schooling into account, a strong effect on civic knowledge is found (Parker, 2003; Youniss, 2011). Besides building knowledge (Niemi & Junn, 1998), more attention has been given to other forms of educating students in becoming citizens in the past decades. The creation of a democratic environment for learning and interacting with peers and teachers, is considered to be at least of equal importance (Flanagan et al., 2007; Hess, 2009; Parker & Hess, 2001; Parker, 2003; Torney-Purta et al., 2001). Schools can be seen as polities where students live together, shaping their ideas and identity as citizens (Flanagan, 2013). Within a school, students of different backgrounds are gathered (e.g. social class, religion and ideological background). Students live together in this public arena, outside their family environment, and come across a divers set of values and opinions. This makes the school an very promising site for experiencing democracy.

In his seminal work "Education and Democracy", Dewey (1916) argues that any experience, however trivial it may seem, can have long lasting effects when the consequences of the experience itself are endured and recognised. The aim is not primarily cognitive, but can be found in the value of the experience itself. Therefore, when we want to stimulate the creation of democratic values, democracy itself should be experienced.

When strengthening the connection between young people and democracy, it seems hardly appropriate to look at the distant relationships these students have with elected representatives (Flanagan, Cumsille, Gill, & Gallay, 2007). For adolescents, the strength of local community ties, as referred to by Dewey (1916), is more relevant. The proximate experiences with teachers and their community members is where capacity building for democratic values can take place. Learning how to be a citizen, to express your opinion and gain confidence in a fair process of coming to a decision, takes time and practice (Flanagan et al., 2007). Within the school environment, confidence in the system, as well as in their own capacities, can grow through recurrent successful experiences. With successful, we refer to qualitative experiences with adults in a respectful manner, showing students that their opinion is valued and taken into account. This makes a schools a very fertile soil for democratic capacity building (Hess, 2009; Parker, 2003).

Democratic Schools

When we talk about schools as places where democracy can be experienced and practiced, we refer to a 'democratic school climate'. Schools are communities where students interact with

each other and learn more about their own position on public matters (Levine, 2006). Young peoples' democratic attitudes are influenced by every-day experiences with democracy, such as decision-making processes in the classroom and whether their opinions are valued by others (Flanagan, 2013; Nieuwelink, Dekker, Geijsel, & ten Dam, 2016). But how can schools improve their democratic outlook? First, we build on a key tenet of deliberative democratic theory to argue that discussions are essential for democratic capacity building within the educational system. Hereafter, we stress the importance of students' sense of efficacy to reach the full potential of these discussions. Thirdly, we look at the relationship between students and teachers, as the latter have to allow discussion within the classroom setting and are in a position to decide whether students' efforts are appreciated or overlooked.

Deliberative democracy within schools

Deliberative democratic theory puts discussion at the centre of democracy (Bianchi, 2008; Dryzek, 2000; Mansbridge, 2003). Since Habermas (1996) and Rawls (1993) made the theory widely known, many definitions of deliberative democracy have been developed by scholars worldwide. One which is comprehensive and frequently used, is the definition of Gutmann and Thompson:

> *"…a form of government in which free and equal citizens justify decisions in a process in which they give one another reasons that are mutually acceptable and generally accessible, with the aim of reaching conclusions that are binding in the present to all citizens but open to challenge in the future.' (Gutmann and Thompson, 2004: 7)*

In other words: reaching a solution to a problem of common good through discussions open to all participants, in which any argumentation should be presented in a comprehensible manner (e.g. excluding purely religious reasoning). The process encourages participants to grow passed self-interest thinking and promotes a mutually respectful process of decision-making. The discussants can reflect on their preferences in a non-coercive manner, possibly leading to a change of opinion in the course of the process (Bianchi, 2008; Dryzek, 2000; Gutmann & Thompson, 2004).

Next to being a model on the institutional level, deliberative democratic theory became commonly used as a participation model for collective decision-making in multiple constellations, ranging from social movement and protest organisations (Ercan & Dryzek, 2015) to an interaction between two citizens (Gundersen, 2000), or what Mansbridge (1999) refers to as 'everyday talk'. This led several scholars to argue that schools are suitable sites for deliberation (Gutmann, 1995; Hess, 2009; Parker, 2003). If the educational system wants to

foster active citizenship among adolescents, we need to teach students how to become democrats without neglecting the diversity of today's society (Enslin et al., 2001). Social diversity, and consequently tolerance towards this diversity, is considered to be a basic virtue for citizenship education by my many distinguished authors (e.g. Gutmann, 1995; Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Macedo, 1995; Parker, 2003; Rawls, 1993), following the reasoning that mutual respect cannot be taught without exposing students to different opinions about public matters.

But how can we 'deliberate' in a classroom setting? When students reason with each other about a matter that exceeds any purely individualistic interest, listen to competing viewpoints and consider each other as equals (Hess & McAvoy, 2015). Students not only learn more about the subjects at hand, but also acquire the skill of engaging in a high quality public talk (Hess, 2009). As schools bring together a variety of students (e.g. gender, religion, social background, intelligence,…), they are inclined to run into a more divers set of opinion on any given subject, than they would in their home environment (Parker, 2003). They learn how to form and express an opinion, but at the same time to listen respectfully to others with whom they might disagree (Avery, Levy, & Simmons, 2013). This teaches respect for reasonable disagreement (Gutmann, 1995), or 'agree to disagree' (Mutz, 2006).

The role of collective efficacy within civic education

Political efficacy is a fundamental political attitude (Almond & Verba, 1989; Hahn, 1998). It is the confidence in one's ability to make a difference (Hahn, 1998; Pasek, Feldman, Romer, & Jamieson, 2008). It is considered to be important for civic engagement, as a sufficient level of efficacy is required to actually participate and become engaged (Delli Carpini, 2000). When someone does not feel able to contribute to a decision-making process or to deal with civic issues, he or she is likely to avoid any involvement (Pasek et al., 2008). This is supported by Bandura's work on social cognitive theory when he argues that people need to believe that they can produce desired effects by their own actions, otherwise they have little incentive to act (Bandura, 2000). To put it even more broadly: "the capacity to exercise control over the nature and quality of one's life is the essence of humanness" (Bandura, 2001, p. 1).

The sense of political efficacy develops early in life. However, adolescents understanding of responsiveness of political authorities may not be shaped directly by the political system, as this is a very distant relationship. To understand the development of feelings of efficacy, we need to look at proximate environments of adolescents in which they interact (Bandura, 1997). Adolescents have many opportunities to try to influence adults within the institutional settings

they have to deal with, most notably within the educational system. These feelings of efficacy can serve as a foundation for feelings of efficacy towards larger communities and political arenas. They learn how to be a citizen through opportunities created within their own communities. (Bandura, 1997; Flanagan et al., 2007; Godfrey & Grayman, 2014).

Many efforts people pursue in live are not achievable by an individual action but only through collective efforts. It requires people to work together and speak with a collective voice to initiate change. The strength of a group, whether it is a family, an organisation or a community, relies on the believe that acting together strengthens their position to improve their lives for the better. The believe that collective action generates power and brings the group closer to the desired outcome is referred to as the perception of collective efficacy (Bandura, 1997, 2001). This is no different for pupils in a school environment. Schools are places where interactions with adults take place on a regular basis, thus creating many opportunities for working together and perceive fair treatment in this proximate environment (Flanagan et al., 2007; Sohl & Arensmeier, 2014). Or as Torney-Purta et al. refers to as 'communities of practice' (Torney-Purta, Barber & Wilkenfeld, 2007), where students learn how to interact and work together with others and develop a foundation for citizenship. If they want to influence adults, in this case the teachers, they ought to work together to accomplish change for the better. When we want to assess students' feelings of political efficacy, we need to look at their perception of initiating change by working together, their sense of collective efficacy (Bandura, 1997, 2001, 2002). In their study on 'youth political consciousness', a concept combining critical reflection, socio-political efficacy and critical action, Godfrey and Grayman (2014) found a strong relationship between the feeling of collective efficacy (or what they refer to as 'school efficacy') and the level of discussion within a classroom. Based on the literature and previous studies, we expect to find the same positive relation between students' perception of '*value of participation*' and the discussion climate, as students who feel their opinions are appreciated and who believe in the power of collective action, will be more inclined to express their opinion.

Why teachers matters

However you look at students interacting with adults in schools, you cannot work around the important authority in the proximate environment of adolescents: the teachers. They can (or cannot) create the discussion opportunities and decide to either value or disregards students' efforts.

A considerable amount of research has been done on the relation between students' feelings of well-being in school on the one hand and their motivation and performance level on the other hand. The way teachers use their authority, how they interacts with students and how standards of respect, fairness and equal treatment are set, reflects deeply on students' feeling of belonging to the school community. Research indicates that this is positively correlated with their engagement and motivation to perform well (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Flanagan et al., 2007; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Roeser, Midgley, & Urdan, 1996; Sullivan & Transue, 1999; Wentzel & Wigfield, 2007; Wentzel, 1997). Midgley et al. (1989) found a strong correlation between the perception of teachers' support and the motivation to learn. The better the school environment was perceived, the more value was given to the subject taught. A positive student-teacher relation, characterised by trust, perception of value of opinion, mutual respect and feelings of belonging, are positively related to engagement and motivation to learn (Roeser et al., 1996). Following the idea of pedagogical caring, the feeling that teachers care about their students is a predictor for motivational outcomes at school. Students will feel more inclined to engage in any classroom activity when they feel cared for. Demonstrating a democratic communication style, which refers to engaging students in dialogues with mutual respect for differences in opinions, was one of the key features of a caring teacher, mentioned by the students (Wentzel, 1997).

If democracy is learning by doing (Dewey, 1916), democratic standards should be set in the school environment and put into practice by the teachers. Deliberative theorists emphasize that the context in which deliberation takes place needs to be characterized by fairness and respect. This is no different in a school environment (Avery et al., 2013; Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Hess, 2009; Parker & Hess, 2001; Parker, 2003). Values such as respect, fair treatment and tolerance should be present and acted upon in the school environment, as this creates a true democratic climate for learning and practicing how to become an engaged citizen (Flanagan et al., 2007). The '*student-teacher relationship'* is therefore perceived as an essential component of a democratic climate where deliberation can be practiced.

When deliberations are essential for democratic capacity building in schools, we need to know how this can be stimulated. Drawing on the above mentioned theories and studies, we want to have a closer look at how the student-teacher relationship and feelings of collective efficacy relate to the discussion climate in schools. When a positive relation can be found, a deeper understanding of the discussion climate in schools can be achieved, which is often indicated as a loophole in existing studies (Campbell, 2008; Persson, 2015; Torney-Purta et al., 2001). Our

research question for analysis is therefore: does the student-teacher relationship and the value of participation have a positive impact on the discussion climate in secondary education?

Data and Sample

The data come from the 2009 International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS 2009), conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). This international study on citizenship education of students enrolled in the eighth grade (approximately 14 year olds) (Schulz et al., 2010) questioned students, teachers and principals about the context in which students learn about citizenship, including classroom climate, knowledge, attitudes and behaviour. This study uses data from the Belgian sample of 2937 students from 151 schools. According to the IEA standards, participating students were selected through a two-stage cluster sample. The schools were sampled within each country using probability proportional to size, measured by the number of students attending a school, to ensure a representative sample. Within each sampled school, an intact class was randomly selected. All students within that class participated. (Schulz, Ainley, & Fraillon, 2009).

The data is nested: pupils within schools. It can be expected that the data is clustered, meaning that students from the same school are likely to have more in common with their fellow students than with students from other schools (Hox, 2010). To take a possible violation of the independence assumption into account, multilevel analyses is used. The first level of analysis is the individual student level. The second level is the schools participating in the survey. The appropriate weights are used when analysing the data, on both levels, to compensate for disproportional selection probabilities (Brese et al., 2009). All variables are entered grand mean centered, to improve interpretation of the results (Hox, 2010; Paccagnella, 2006). Each students receives a score which resembles the deviation from the grand mean score for that variable.

Measures[1]

Classroom climate

A deliberative classroom setting is one where open discussions on matters of political or social interest take place in a respectful and inclusive manner. Previous research indicates that having regular classroom discussions lead to higher political knowledge, political interest, political

[1] All items used to construct the scales can be found in appendix, alongside the descriptive statistics.

trust, perceived future participation, appreciation of conflict and intention to vote (Barber, Sweetwood, & King, 2015; Campbell, 2008; Claes et al., 2012; Dassonneville, Quintelier, Hooghe, & Claes, 2012; Gniewosz & Noack, 2008; Godfrey & Grayman, 2014; Hahn, 1998; Torney-Purta et al., 2001). However, students and teachers seem to have a rather limited conception of what a good discussion is, and do not often engage in a qualitative, in-depth discussion. When several students shortly state their opinion without real student-student interaction, they presume they were involved a discussion (Avery et al., 2013; Torney-Purta et al., 2001). This is consistent with findings for adults, as only 23% of American adults engage in a real political discussion with people having different opinions then their own (Mutz, 2006). But when such discussions do find place, even without meeting all conditions of a good deliberative practice, they are still positively related to the above mentioned civic outcomes. This led Avery et al. (2013) to conclude that even minimalist discussions stimulate civic attitudes and skills. Therefore, we measure the discussion climate within the school via the construct 'open classroom climate', initiated by the International Civic Education Study of 1999, which captures 'the extent to which students experience their classrooms as places to investigate issues and explore their opinions and those of their peers' (Torney-Purta et al., 2001, p. 138) and was used by many other scholars in previous studies (e.g. Campbell, 2008; Dassonneville et al., 2012; Gainous & Martens, 2012; Lenzi et al., 2014; Persson, 2015).

The construct consists of 6 items on a four-point scale ('never', 'rarely', 'sometimes', or 'often'). The items ask if students are encourages to form and express an opinion, but grasp as well the display of different opinions ('students express opinion in class even when their opinions are different from most of the other students', 'teachers encourage students to discuss the issues with people having different opinions' and 'teachers express several sides of the issues when explaining them in class'). In addition, one of the items asks if students bring up current political events for discussion, which requires them to feel sufficiently comfortable to raise issues they feel worthy of being discussed. The internal consistency of the scale was examined for the Belgium sample by the Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.735$) and corrected item-total correlations, ranging from 0.37 to 0.56. Higher values on the scale represent a higher level of perceived openness of the classroom discussion climate. Weighted likelihood estimates for the latent dimensions were used to acquire a scale with an international average of 50 and a

standard deviation of 10 for the weighted dataset (as described in the Technical Report of ICCS 2009: Schulz et al., 2009, p.163).[2]

Value of student participation

Similarly to the study of Godfrey and Grayman (2014) on fostering critical consciousness, we measure collective efficacy through students' perception of how their participation efforts can lead to change and the extent to which they feel valued within the school environment. The scale consists of 5 items on a four-point scale (ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'). A higher score resembles a higher extent of agreement with the statements about the value of participation (Schulz et al., 2009). The items question students about their agreements with statements such as 'lots of positive changes can happen if students work together' and 'students participation in how schools are run can make schools better'. The reliability of the scale for the Belgian sample has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.701.

We hypothesize that a higher score on the value of student participation leads to a higher score on classroom climate, derived from the idea that if students feel that working together can create positive changes and their efforts are valued, the school becomes a small-scale democratic society. We believe this practice will stimulates the level of discussions in the classroom.

Student-teacher relationship

Deliberation only reaches its full potential when embedded in a fair and respectful environment (Avery et al., 2013). Therefore, a good relationship between students and teachers is imperative when creating a constructive and supportive atmosphere in which an open classroom climate, and more in general a deliberative environment, can exist. We measure this though 5 items, asking students about the relationships in their school: e.g. 'most of my teachers treat me fairly', 'students get along well with most teachers' and 'most of my teachers really listen to what I have to say'. The scale's internal consistency is 0.780 (Cronbach's alpha).

We hypothesize that the student-teacher relationship has a positive relation with open classroom climate, as fairness and respect are considered as prerequisites for good deliberative environments. The better the perceived relationship with the adults in school, the more the

[2] This is also the case for the other ICCS scales used in the analyses: value of student participation and student-teacher relationship.

students are likely to express their opinions, even if they disagree with the teacher or with other students.

Background characteristics

We will also include several demographic characteristics of the students as control variables, of which previous research indicated that an influence on classroom climate could be identified. We expect a positive correlation between classroom climate and gender, as girls are more likely to report a higher level of openness of classroom climate than boys (Barber et al., 2015; Campbell, 2007).

Immigration background will be included, as ethnic background is often claimed to be related to different forms of engagement (e.g. Geijsel et al., 2012; Kahne and Sporte, 2008). Campbell found in his study on American high school students that racially mixed classes lead to less discussions (Campbell, 2007). Students with migration background include first and second generation migrants, using students' self-report.

Socioeconomic background has proved to be highly relevant when analyzing data on political attitudes and competences (Campbell, 2008; Castillo, Miranda, Bonhomme, Cox, & Bascopé, 2015; Geijsel, Ledoux, Reumerman, & ten Dam, 2012; Verba et al., 1995). We use home literacy as a proxy variable for the social background of the family as it reflect the general intellectual environment in the home situation (Barber et al., 2015; Campbell, 2007; Claes et al., 2012; Manganelli, Lucidi, & Alivernini, 2015; Persson, 2012; Torney-Purta et al., 2001).

Previous research has reported a positive link between open classroom climate and the level of political knowledge of the students (Campbell, 2007, 2008; Gainous & Martens, 2012; Persson, 2015). We therefore include the score for political knowledge, based on 79 international cognitive test items, in our model as a control variable.

Discussions outside the classroom

In our analyses, we also take the discussion habits of the students outside the classroom into account. Learning how to form and express an opinion and to listen respectfully to you counterpart are skills that can be acquired in many different settings. Especially the home environment and discussions with friends on political or socially relevant topics can serve as practice for engaging in a political talk. This way, discussions become a part of students' everyday discourse. They will feel more inclined to engage in any discussion, also within the school environment (Youniss, 2011). We therefore expect a positive relation between political discussions with family and friends, and the perception of open classroom climate. Political

discussions with friends and family are included in a four-point-scale, ranging from 'never to hardly ever' to 'daily or almost daily'.

Results

The null model shows an intraclass correlation of 10.3, which supports our choice for multilevel analysis. In the first model, we have included the student-teacher relations and the value of participation. Both variables have a significant effect on the perception of classroom climate (0.213 and 0.078 respectively, $p<.001$), which is in accordance with our hypotheses. When students perceive the relation with the teachers as respectfully and fair, they think of the classroom climate as more open, compared to students who experience a more unfair treatment. The same goes for the value of participation: student with a higher sense of collective efficacy report a more open discussion climate.

In the second model, we include the demographic background characteristics of the students. Gender proves, as is the case in most studies that include classroom climate, to have a significant effect. Girls perceive the classroom climate to be more open than their male peers (2.767, $p<.001$). Also students with an immigration background and students more political knowledge tend to perceive a more open climate for discussion. However, when the two measures for discussion outside the classroom are taken into account in model three, these coefficients are no longer significant. Practice of discussion elsewhere is an predictor of the openness of the classroom discussion. (0.751 for discussions within the family and 0.987 for discussions with friends, $p<.001$). For home literacy, we were not able to show significant effects on our dependent variable. The social economic status does not seem to effect the discussion climate in this case.

In our last model, we take the mean score of each school for the student-teacher relation and the value of participation into account.[3] The individual level effects are still present, as well as a school effect for the student-teacher relation (0.197, $p<.01$) could be retrieved. This means that a relation characterised by fairness and respect has an effect on the individual students, as well as on the school level. A higher classroom mean score leads to a better perceived discussion climate.

[3] As all other variables, also the school level variables are entered grand mean centered.

Discussion

The results of our analyses confirm that the teacher plays a crucial role when unfolding a democratic school climate. As previous research of Wentzel (1997) indicated: the feeling that teachers care for them motivates students to perform well. Our results show that this is also the case when maintaining an open discussion climate. Students who perceive a fair treatment, who feel respected and get along well with their teachers think of their schools as places where students are encouraged to express their opinion and discuss matters with people who have a different view than their own. We found similar results for collective efficacy: when students' feel that working together can initiate positive changes within the school environment, they perceive the classroom climate as more open. These findings confirm our hypotheses and shows that a context of fairness and respect, as well as a context which is responsive towards their demands, stimulates deliberation, also in the school environment. Within this democratic climate, students can develop skills to deliberate and practice how to become an engaged citizen. As this is an important goal of citizenship education, the stimulation of a democratic school climate through the school context should not be overlooked by schools and policy.

Based on the literature and previous studies, we have argued that the discussion climate is a good measurement for deliberation within secondary schools. Even without meeting all conditions for good deliberation, the relation between discussions and civic outcomes (e.g. political trust, political interest, tolerance,…) remain present. However, the open classroom climate measurement does not cover the quality of the discussions. Future research through observations or experiments could give more information about what is being said during the discussion and what the role of the teacher is. Only then we can evaluate if discussions are deliberations, or mere classroom talks.

If we want to maintain an engaged citizenry, we need to learn our adolescents within their natural environment what it means to be part of a democracy. If engaging in a deliberative discussion produces learning, students will become better informed and display more tolerance towards the diversity inherent to our society (Hess, 2009; Parker, 2003). Schools are promising sites for experiencing deliberation. When embedded in a fair and respectful environment, students will be able to explore their position within this democratic polity and practice the art of deliberation.

Table 1. The effect of student-teacher relationship and value of participation on open classroom climate

	Null Model	Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV
Intercept	49.678 (0.334)***	49.638 (0.302)***	49.675 (0.273)***	49.666 (0.274)***	49.644 (0.263)***
Individual level variables					
student teacher relation		0.213 (0.022)***	0.208 (0.021)***	0.200 (0.021)***	0.187 (0.022)***
value of participation		0.078 (0.020)***	0.072 (0.020)***	0.064 (0.020)***	0.059 (0.021)**
gender (girls=1)			2.767 (0.380)***	2.758 (0.377)***	2.761 (0.375)***
immigr. background (yes=1)			1.350 (0.623)**	0.998 (0.623)	1.038 (0.620)
home literature			0.006 (0.151)	-0.105 (0.152)	-0.113 (0.152)
political knowledge			0.043 (0.021)**	0.030 (0.021)	0.024 (0.021)
political discussion family				0.751 (0.250)***	0.748 (0.249)***
political discussion friends				0.987 (0.314)***	0.964 (0.314)***
School level variables					
student teacher relation					0.197 (0.084)**
value of participation					0.126 (0.102)
individual level variance	71.788	68.404	67.111	65.984	65.962
intercept variance	8.231	6.276	4.570	4.673	4.117
ICC	0.103	0.084	0.064	0.066	0.059
Deviance	20347	20188	20107	20063	20051

Note: Entries are coefficient estimates and standard errors (in parentheses) of a multilevel linear regression using HLM (full maximum likelihood estimation). The models include 2837 individuals at first level and 151 schools at second level. The appropriate weights were used to compensate for disproportional selection probabilities at both levels. All variables are entered grand mean centered. Significance levels: *<0.05; **<0.01; ***<0.001.

Appendix

Descriptive statistics

	n	mean	SD	min	max	% missings
open classroom climate	2837	49.29	8.75	14.83	78.98	0.3
student teacher relation	2837	48.78	8.72	17.62	73.53	0.2
value of participation	2837	49.73	9.14	15.18	69.83	0.2
gender	2837	0.50	0.50	0.00	1.00	0.6
immigration background	2837	0.11	0.31	0.00	1.00	1.9
home literature	2837	1.97	1.26	0.00	5.00	0.6
political knowledge	2837	150.51	9.78	104.20	200.35	0.9
political discussion family	2837	1.48	0.82	1.00	4.00	0.3
political discussion friends	2837	1.30	0.64	1.00	4.00	0.3
student teacher relation - school	151	48.87	3.48	39.43	57.20	0.0
value of participation - school	151	49.55	2.89	41.99	57.57	0.0

Variables

Open classroom climate:

Question: When discussing political and social issues during regular lessons, how often do the following things happen? Response options: 'never' – 'rarely' – 'sometimes' – 'often'.

- Teachers encourage students to make up their own mind.
- Teachers encourage students to express their opinion.
- Students bring up current political events for discussion in class.
- Students express opinions in class even when their opinions are different from most of the other students.
- Teachers encourage students to discuss the issues with people having different opinions.
- Teachers present several sides of the issues when explaining them in class.

Weighted likelihood estimates for the latent dimension were transformed to a scale with international average of 50 and standard deviation 10. Cronbach's alpha is 0.76 for the pooled ICCS data, and 0.74 for the Belgian sample (Schulz et al., 2009).

Student-teacher relations:

Question: how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about you and your school? Response options: 'strongly agree' – 'agree' – 'disagree' – 'strongly disagree'.

- Most of my teachers treat me fairly
- Students get along well with most teachers
- Most teachers are interested in students' wellbeing
- Most of my teachers really listen to what I have to say
- If I need extra help, I will receive it from my teachers

Weighted likelihood estimates for the latent dimension were transformed to a scale with international average of 50 and standard deviation 10. Cronbach's alpha is 0.78 for the pooled ICCS data, as well as for the Belgian sample (Schulz et al., 2009).

For the values of 'student-teacher relations' on the second level, a mean value for each school was measured.

Value of student participation:

Question: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about student participation at school? Response options: 'strongly agree' – 'agree' – 'disagree' – 'strongly disagree'.

- Students participation in how schools are run can make schools better
- Lots of positive changes can happen in schools when students work together
- Organising groups of students to express their opinions could help solve problems in schools
- All schools should have a school parliament
- Student can have more influence on what happens in schools of they act together rather than alone

Weighted likelihood estimates for the latent dimension were transformed to a scale with international average of 50 and standard deviation 10. Cronbach's alpha is 0.73 for the pooled ICCS data, and 0.70 for the Belgian sample (Schulz et al., 2009).

For the values of 'value of student participation' on the second level, a mean value for each school was measured.

Gender:

Boys 0 – Girls 1

Immigration background:

Immigration background = first or second generation migrants

Students without immigration background 0 – Students with immigration background 1

Political discussion with friends and political discussion with family:

Participation in discussions with friends and parents about political or social issues.

Response categories: never to hardly ever – monthly – weekly – daily or almost daily

Civic Knowledge

National Civic Knowledge Rasch Scores (NWLCIV), standardized to have a mean score of 150 points and a standard deviation of 10 points within each country. The scaling is based on the 79 adjudicated international cognitive test items and provides nationally comparable results for students' civic knowledge.

Home literacy

Data on students' home literacy resources were derived from a question that asked students how many books they had in their homes. The index on home literacy had the following categories:

0 to 10 books (0) - 11 to 25 books (1) - 26 to 100 books (2) - 101 to 200 books (3) - 201 to 500 books (4) - more than 500 books (5)

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